IN THE DRAWINGS:

Please replace the drawing sheets as filed with the Replacement Sheets attached hereto, and add new Figs. 6a and 6b found on the New Sheet attached hereto.

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REMARKS

The Office Action of November 13, 2006 has been carefully considered.

The specification has been amended to provide a reference to the previously filed PCT application, and to add proper subject matter headings.

Objection has been raised to the drawings as not showing the plastic deformation step of the invention, and in failure to label Figures 1-4 as "prior art." Replacement sheets have now been submitted for Figures 1-4, in which these figures have been labeled as prior art. New Figure 6a and 6b have also been submitted, showing the step of plastic deformation between two rolls, as is claimed. These drawings are clearly supported by the text of the specification on pages 14 and 15; no new matter has been added.

The specification has been amended to reference the added drawings.

Claims 1-10 have now been canceled and replaced by a new set of claims 11 through 23. These new claims have been written in proper form for US practice and the dependency of each claim has been specified.

Claims 1 and 2 have been rejected under 35 USC 102(b) over Croce et al, and claims 3, 6, 7 and 9 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) over Croce et al.

New claim 11 is directed to an improvement in a method for forming a flexible tube skirt comprising obtaining a preformed planar web of predetermined initial thickness, forming a cylindrical sleeve from the planar web, and cutting the cylindrical sleeve to a predetermined length to obtain the skirt. The improvement in this method comprises, prior to forming the cylindrical sleeve, passing the planar web between two rolls moving relative to each other, the space between the

rolls defining an air gap of a dimension less than the initial thickness of the web, thereby subjecting the web to a plastic deformation.

New claim 11 incorporates the recitations of claims 1 and 2 as filed.

The Croce et al reference is directed to a method for making flexible tube skirts, including the step of making a cylindrical sleeve from a planar web formed from multiple layers. The process includes a step of forming the planar web, as shown in Figure 2, from a plurality of webs which are fed between pressure rolls 9 and 10, which effectively laminate the webs together. This is confirmed at column 2, lines 49-52, where it is stated that "[t]he several webs in their areas of direct juxtaposition are desirably united to one another by heat and pressure applied by the rollers 9 and 10, to form a composite web."

Croce et al thus discloses a step in which elementary webs are heated and pressed together in order to obtain a composite web, but does not disclose or suggest subjecting the composite web, after manufacture, to a plastic deformation. To the contrary, the claimed invention requires obtaining a preformed web, and subjecting the preformed web to a plastic deformation which allows a reduction in residual stresses that result from the manufacturing process, and particularly from the heating and pressing between rolls as shown by Croce et al. These residual stresses are distributed within the thickness of the web, but are irregular in distribution depending upon manufacturing conditions that are not easy to control.

Nothing in the cited reference would disclose or suggest to one of ordinary skill in the art subjecting a preformed web to an additional deformation in order to relieve residual

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stresses which are the result of the original manufacturing process. Accordingly, withdrawal of these rejections is requested.

Claims 4, 5 and 10 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) over Croce et al in view of Corbett. The patent to Croce et al has been discussed in detail above.

Corbett discloses a method for improving the finished appearance of a rolled sheet of thin thermoplastic material, comprising temporarily embossing the sheet to produce a regular pattern immediately prior to laying of the sheet on a roll. This embossing is obtained by maintaining a pressure between the rolls to a "degree sufficient to impress the embossed roll pattern into the material of the film web, *without exceeding the elastic limit of the web material*" (col. 2, lines 69-71, emphasis added). This prior embossing enables compensation for the shrinkage and change in density of the film material, thus avoiding the development of depressions or ridges in the wound film (col. 1, lines 39-42).

Corbett does not, however, disclose or suggest the positive influence of embossing a web in a process for obtaining a regular circular sleeve after rolling and seaming the web, and does not disclose or suggest that the embossing must result in *plastic deformation* in the thickness of the web.

Withdrawal of this rejection is requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicant submits that the present application is now in condition for allowance. An early allowance of the application with amended claims is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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